

Finding a Mentor

Some of the most valuable professional relationships are found outside your traditional circle of coworkers and friends. Challenge yourself to foster relationships beyond the office and you might develop a productive relationship with a mentor who can help guide your career growth and professional development. Check out the YALI Network blog post [Getting the Most From Your Mentoring Relationship](#) to learn more about mentorship and its benefits. If you decide you would like to pursue such a relationship, it is important to think strategically about how you could use this type of support, and incorporate finding a mentor into your career planning.

Finding a mentor does not necessarily require a formal process, but it does require planning, commitment, and sincerity. A mentor relationship often can grow naturally as you build and strengthen personal connections beyond your existing social circle. Keep reading for tips on finding a mentor, and check out the [YALI Network Mentor Meeting tool](#) for information on getting the most out of your time with your mentor.

1. **Look for formal programs.** Quite a few large companies offer mentorship programs to their employees, so it is worth looking into whether your workplace offers such an opportunity. If not, and you would prefer a structured program rather than a do-it-yourself approach, there are organized groups, such as [Mara Mentor](#), that offer mentorship opportunities. Research online or ask around among your contacts to find additional programs. However, if you are interested in finding a mentor on your own, the following tips will help you!
2. **Build your professional connections.** You never know who might end up being a valuable mentor, so it's worth developing relationships with a variety of people. As those relationships grow, you may find one person in particular that you connect with, and who is interested in supporting your personal and career growth. For more information on developing your network, check out the lesson [Networking to Get Ahead](#) from the YALI Network Online Courses and the [Professional Networking 101](#) blog post.
3. **Use your school connections.** Many people find their first mentor while at university, simply by building close relationships with instructors whose experiences and perspectives they particularly respect. If you are in school or a recent graduate, consider keeping in touch with teachers who may be interested in providing ongoing guidance. Even if you are already long past your university years, there may be an alumni group through which you can find potential mentors.
4. **Look beyond those similar to you.** It can be tempting to find a mentor who is very similar to you, as it can be easier to envision modeling your career after that person's. However, sometimes the most insightful guidance comes from people very dissimilar to you. Think about people of different genders, ethnicities, and even career fields as potential mentors.
5. **Consider multiple mentors.** A singular, main point of contact is valuable when seeking guidance over a long period of time, however, it can be beneficial to include several people with different backgrounds and diverse perspectives as you grow and develop. A wider mentor group makes you better equipped when handling an unexpected or unusual challenge, so you might consider having a range of mentors with whom you engage at different times.
6. **Don't forget about your peers.** Most people think of a mentor as someone older and wiser. However, your peers also can offer unique perspectives on your goals and challenges. Consider forming a peer networking group to tap into this potential.

7. **Pay it forward.** Mentorship only works when people make the decision to share their knowledge and experience with those who could benefit from it, often for little or no concrete benefit to themselves. One of the best ways you can express your appreciation for those who have assisted you, whether in a formal mentorship capacity or by providing more informal guidance, is to support others as they progress through their careers.
-

Getting the Most From Your Mentoring Relationship

Professor Judy Millesen describes mentorship as an “agreement between two people sharing experiences and expertise to help with reflection, decision-making, and action” to improve personal growth and professional development.

The purpose of mentorship is for individuals to help one another grow and develop while providing benefits for everyone involved. The benefits of a mentoring relationship include the transfer of knowledge, experiences, opinions, and ideas. Another benefit of mentorship is the increase of productivity due to the collaborative nature of mentoring.

Mentor relationships can be versatile despite common myths. Mentor relationships can be short-term or long-term. The relationships can be between individuals, peers, or groups. They can also be formal or informal in nature. The goal of mentorship is to align people with common goals.

The two types of mentors are career mentors and psychosocial mentors. A career mentor helps an individual with career advancement. A psychosocial mentor serves as a role model by helping an individual develop skills, confidence, and professional identity.

The three elements to a successful relationship between mentors and mentees are respect, trust, and listening. Respect is gained through proper eye contact, communication, and professional body language. Trust is gained through upholding agreements. Active listening allows for full engagement between mentors and mentees.

Communication is a key factor in achieving successful mentoring relationships. Proper communication involves maintaining eye contact, using professional body language, and making sure to clarify meanings to gain specific information. The mentor relationship requires a written summary of agreements so the parties do not stray away from the goal. It is important to know when it is proper to email, call, or have a face-to-face conversation with a mentor. A mentoring relationship should avoid becoming too dependent on a mentor and both sides should stay actively engaged to avoid a decline in the relationship.

Some advice for mentees include:

1. Identify goals

2. Be willing to learn
3. Actively seek counsel and advice
4. Take responsibility
5. Be open to feedback and coaching
6. Understand the parameters of the relationship
7. Be aware of potential pitfalls and how to deal with a challenging situation

Some advice for mentors include:

1. Recognize that mentee might be uncomfortable asking for help
2. Advise, not manage
3. Listen, counsel, coach, give career advice, and set goals
4. Provide developmental feedback, not criticism
5. Know the mentee sets the pace of the relationship
6. Expand mentee's developmental network and suggest other mentors for certain needs
7. Suggest skills training
8. Be aware of potential pitfalls and how to deal with a challenging situation

The mentor is able to share their wisdom and experience with the mentee. It is also important to be open to experimentation on how to implement new ideas to achieve a common goal. Mentor relationships allow parties to share mutual goals and evaluate the progress made on those common goals. Another important aspect of mentoring relationships is to remember the initial goals and aspirations created before going into the relationship.

People who have been mentored have an increased likelihood of career success. A mentoring relationship helps develop an individual's organizational and professional identity while improving leadership and professional practices among both parties.

Judy Millesen is an associate professor of public affairs at Ohio University. She provides training in mentoring and leadership for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

Mentors Help Guide Entrepreneur's Businesses

Cynthia



Nigerian entrepreneur Cynthia proved that there is financial and environmental value in cassava peels.

A finalist in the 2014 Global Innovation through Science and Technology competition and a YALI

Network member, Cynthia developed a way to convert cassava peels into nutritious goat feed. Farmers had perceived the peels as a useless byproduct and burned them as a cheap way of disposal. But that practice releases harmful pollutants into the atmosphere.

Nigeria is the world's largest producer of cassava, each year growing 40 metric tons and generating 12 million metric tons of peels. When burned, those peels release more than 10 million tons of toxic carbon monoxide in the air.


Cynthia's solution to the problem begins with a simple platform on which peels are dried. The dried peels are packaged and sold as a healthy goat feed. By selling both food products derived from the cassava tuber and animal feed, farmers can utilize 100 percent of their plants and boost their incomes. "This is something the community embraces with joy and excitement," Cynthia says.

In 2013, Cynthia, 24, founded the social enterprise Kadosh Production Company in Delta state to recycle cassava waste. The venture also helps small-scale farmers get credit so they can purchase drying platforms, and it links cassava growers and processors with goat-farmer customers. With an eye set on expansion to other countries, Cynthia says she hopes her business will grow to be "a major influence in the Nigerian economy and Africa at large."

Cynthia has a bachelor's degree in textile science and polymer technology and a master's in business administration from Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Nigeria. She says that since she was young, her parents have inspired her to go into business.

Further inspiration came later when Cynthia volunteered to work for a year at a woman-owned bakery "to learn how to run a business of my own." At the bakery she learned about the challenges associated with running a business and how to handle those challenges. The experience "made me confident that I could run my own business," she says.

Cynthia received further business advice from a U.S. mentor — a former United Parcel Service executive. Gary Mastro is one of many experienced businesspeople [MicroMentor](#) has matched with young entrepreneurs around the world. MicroMentor is an initiative of the nonprofit humanitarian group Mercy Corps based in Oregon. More than half of the entrepreneurs who request its help are from outside the United States, the group notes.

Cynthia, center, stands with some of the  entrepreneurs she has mentored and their supporters.

Cynthia's first venture was a liquid soap company called EverGlow that makes an affordable, hygienic alternative to bar soap. "Gary is a pillar in my business and a man I respect so much," she says.

And now Cynthia is a mentor herself. In 2013 she founded Confident Women to mentor young women and teach them about home management, family relationships and how to make liquid soap so they could start their own small-scale businesses. The businesswoman later changed the name of Confident Women to the CAMY Foundation after collaborating with a partner in Zimbabwe who wanted a similar mentoring model in her country. CAMY Foundation now has more than 450 women

members in Nigeria and Zimbabwe.

Cynthia says she communicates regularly with other YALI Network members who tell her about what is happening in other countries and let her “see the great work young leaders like me are doing.”

“This encourages me a lot to keep up the work and never give up so we can have a better future.” She adds that she learns a lot from the ongoing [YALIChat](#) Twitter conversation.

Cynthia encourages other YALI Network members and potential members to “maximize the opportunities from YALI Network” and to “be a change in their society.”

Learn more about the [GIST Tech-I business pitch competition](#).
